

ACROSS THE AGES

A History of WESTERN CIVILIZATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Unit 1

ORIGINS OF CIVILIZATION

Chapter 1 The Beginning of Time ≡ 0-930 A.C.

2

Where Did Man Come From?
Sin Disrupts God's Creation
Civilizations Develop and Scatter
Archaeologists Study Ancient Civilizations

Chapter 2 Early Civilizations ≡ 1656 A.C.-1990 B.C.

18

Scattered People Build Civilizations
A Civilization Arises in the Fertile Crescent
Sumerians Write Without Words
Empires Emerge in Sumer

Chapter 3 Abraham—From Ur to Canaan ≡ 2000-1500 B.C.

34

Sumerians Face Troubled Times
Mesopotamians Fear Many Gods
God Makes a Covenant With Abraham
Famine Forces a Move From Canaan

Unit 2

EMPIRES OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Chapter 4 Egypt—Empire on the Nile ≡ UNKNOWN–1155 B.C. 50

A Kingdom Grows Along the Nile
The Old Kingdom Thrives
The Middle Kingdom Replaces the Old
The New Kingdom Rises and Falls

Chapter 5 Israel—God's Covenant Nation ≡ 1550–586 B.C. 68

The Israelites Become a People
The Israelites Enter the Promised Land
Israel Becomes a Mighty Nation
The Southern Kingdom Rises and Falls

Chapter 6 The Age of Empire ≡ 1210–486 B.C. 86

Old Nations Give Way to New
The Assyrians Increase Their Empire
Nebuchadnezzar Rules Mighty Babylon
Wise Rulers Unite the Persian Empire

Unit 3

MEDITERRANEAN EMPIRES

Chapter 7 Greece—Empire in the Aegean ≡ C. 2000–300 B.C. 106

Civilization Reaches the Aegean
The Greeks Face Internal Strife and External Threats
Athens Experiences a Golden Age
Alexander the Great Builds an Empire

Chapter 8 The Roman Republic ≡ 753–80 B.C. 126

Civilization Grows in Italy
A Citizens' Assembly Is Created
Conquest Enlarges Rome
Rome Suffers the Consequences of War

Chapter 9 Jesus Christ, the Messiah ≡ 323 B.C.–A.D. 30 142

The Jews Submit to Greek Rule
The Messiah Appears in Israel
Sects Develop in Judea
Jesus Is Crucified and Resurrected

Unit 4

THE ROMAN WORLD

Chapter 10 Rise of the Roman Empire \approx 80 B.C.–A.D. 96

162

A Permanent Dictator Rules Rome
A New Caesar Takes the Throne
Five Descendants of Julius Caesar Lead Rome
The Empire Grows Despite Hard Times

Chapter 11 Decline of the Roman Empire \approx A.D. 96–476

180

Rome Enjoys Prosperity
Rome Enters a Long Decline
A New Empire Emerges From Rome
The Roman Empire Staggers to Its End

Chapter 12 The Early Church \approx A.D. 30–500

198

The Church Is Founded
Jews Rebel Against Rome
Christianity Faces New Challenges
Spirituality Declines

Unit 5

THE MIDDLE AGES

Chapter 13 The Early Middle Ages \approx A.D. 500–1000

218

Frankish Kings Arise
The Vikings Raid and Rule
Kings Struggle for Control of Britain
The Medieval Church Gains Power

Chapter 14 The Byzantine Empire \approx 527–1453

236

The Orthodox Church Grows
A Muslim Empire Arises
The Islamic Empire Thrives
Byzantine Scholars Influence the West

Chapter 15 The High and Late Middle Ages \approx 1000–1500

254

A New Age Begins
Feudalism Prevails for Centuries
European Crusades Produce Unforeseen Results
Europeans Suffer Times of Crisis

Unit 6

REFORMATION AND RENEWAL

Chapter 16 Renaissance and Discovery ≡ 1350–1750 274

New Ways of Thinking Develop
Innovative Art Styles Emerge
Trade and Travel Stimulate Exploration
Discovery Brings a Worldwide Exchange

Chapter 17 The Reformation ≡ 1517–c. 1600 294

The Church Controls Society
Influential Men Spark Reform
A Reformation Shakes the Church
The Church Undergoes Further Divisions

Chapter 18 The Anabaptist Movement ≡ 1525–1700 312

Zwingli Introduces Reforms
Reformers Persecute Reformers
A Catholic Priest Becomes an Anabaptist
Conflict Divides the Anabaptists

Unit 7

ENLIGHTENMENT AND REVOLUTION

Chapter 19 The Early Modern Period ≡ c. 1400–c. 1800 332

Civilization Is Remade
Strong Nations Develop Through Global Trade
Catholic Rulers Face Protestants
The Early Modern Period Changes Europe

Chapter 20 The Enlightenment ≡ c. 1650–c. 1800 352

Thinking in Europe Changes
Troubling Times Erode Faith
Enlightenment Ideas Create Doubt
Writers Develop New Political Theories

Chapter 21 Demands for Change ≡ 1215–1800 370

Monarchs Face Limitations
The English Execute Their King
Monarchs Suffer Revolt
An Enlightened King Attempts Reform

Unit 8

CONQUEST AND INDUSTRY

Chapter 22 The Age of Revolution ≡ 1774–1848

390

*A French General Takes Control
Europe Wages the Napoleonic Wars
Europe Enters the Late Modern Period
Romantic Ideals Influence the West*

Chapter 23 The Global Growth of Christianity ≡ 1700–1900

408

*European Churches Change
An Evangelical Revival Stirs the English Church
The Great Century of Missions Begins
American Churches Experience Further Revival*

Chapter 24 The Industrial Revolution ≡ 1750–1900

426

*A New Age Unfolds
The Industrial Revolution Creates Hardships
Urban Growth Causes New Issues
Innovations Bring Widespread Changes*

Unit 9

IMPERIALISM AND THE WORLD WARS

Chapter 25 The Age of Imperialism ≡ 1870–1914

446

*European Nations Build Empires
The British Empire Controls India
European Imperialism Circles the Globe
The Age of Imperialism Comes to a Close*

Chapter 26 The World at War ≡ 1900–1920

464

*The West Enjoys Prosperity
Political Tensions Erupt Into War
Europe Fights a Modern War
Nations Suffer Postwar Troubles*

Chapter 27 At War Again ≡ 1920–1948

482

*A Dictator Rises in Europe
Hitler Propels Europe Into War
The War Ends
Leaders Seek a Place for Jews*

Unit 10

GLOBALIZATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Chapter 28	The Cold War Era ≡ 1947–1991	502
	<i>Communism Grows in Europe</i>	
	<i>A Cold War Develops</i>	
	<i>Communist Threats Continue Worldwide</i>	
	<i>Opposition to Communist Rule Spreads</i>	
Chapter 29	A Shrinking World ≡ 1950–PRESENT	520
	<i>Expanding Economies Drive Trade</i>	
	<i>International Trade Expands</i>	
	<i>Military Technology Transforms Society</i>	
	<i>Technology Connects and Divides</i>	
Chapter 30	A Changing World ≡ 1950–PRESENT	536
	<i>Environmental Concerns Increase</i>	
	<i>Oil Dependence Leads to Strife</i>	
	<i>Shifting Populations Produce Strife</i>	
	<i>Christianity Declines in the West</i>	
	Nations of the Cultural West	552
	Map Index	555
	Political Map of the World	556
	Physical Map of the World	558
	Index	560
	Acknowledgments & Credits	574

Pronunciation Guide

/a/ bat; /ā/ acorn; /är/ star; /e/ pet; /ē/ eagle; /er/ bear; /ər/ her; /i/ bit; /ī/ ivy;
/ir/ deer; /ä/ top; /ō/ go; /ò/ lost; /òi/ coin; /au/ out; /òr/ corn; /ə/ but; /ü/ boot;
/yü/ use; /ù/ foot; /th/ thick; /th/ this; /ŋ/ bang; /zh/ measure

EARLY CIVILIZATIONS

1656 A.C. – 1990 B.C.



Terms

- city-states
- cuneiform
- Akkadian Empire
- ziggurats
- loess
- terraces



People

- Sargon
- Ur-Nammu



Places

- Indus River
- Fertile Crescent
- Mesopotamia
- Ur
- Yellow River Valley

“DO NOT TIE YOUR
SHOELACE IN A
MELON FIELD OR
ADJUST YOUR HAT
UNDER A PLUM TREE
IF YOU WANT TO
AVOID SUSPICION.”

– Chinese proverb

Chapter 2 starts where Chapter 1, Section 3 ended. It describes people scattering from Sumer and beginning communities all over the world. Then the text returns to the people still in Sumer and tells about the development of the Sumerian civilization and its first empires. Chapter 2 closes by explaining the causes for the decline and collapse of the Sumerian civilization.

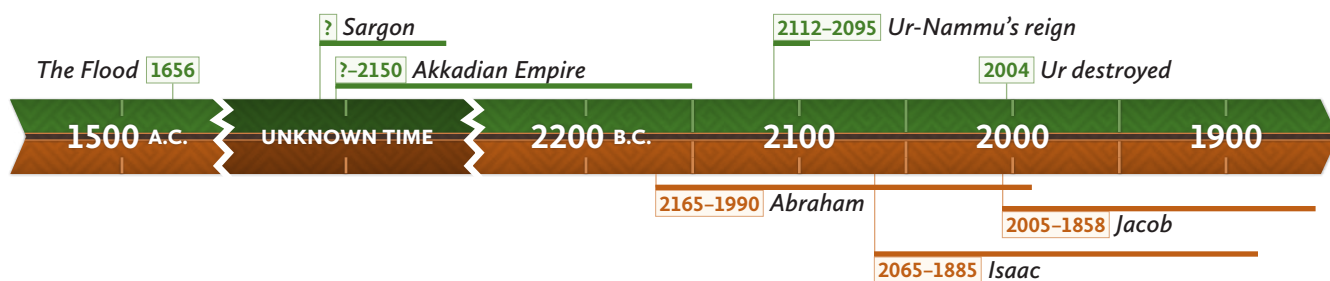
SECTION 1 ⊕ Scattered People Build Civilizations

From Mount Ararat, Noah’s descendants began moving east. They settled in the land of Sumer and began building a city with the Tower of Babel at its center. When God scattered the people by confusing their languages, some left for distant lands. Others stayed in Sumer.

Little is known of the people who left Sumer, but what is known suggests that they migrated in all directions. Some traveled southwest



The Bronze Tree of Sanxingdui (left), which dates from one of the earliest Chinese civilizations, stands 13 feet (4 m) tall. The tree’s fruit is protected by knives and by a serpent that stands at the base (above right). Near the serpent, a hand (above left) reaches for a piece of fruit.



into Africa, settling along the banks of the Nile River. From those settlers the Egyptian civilization began to develop, and kings arose. Over the centuries, the Egyptians and the Sumerians shared ideas, traded goods, and fought one another. Their achievements affected the development of all later civilizations in the Western world.

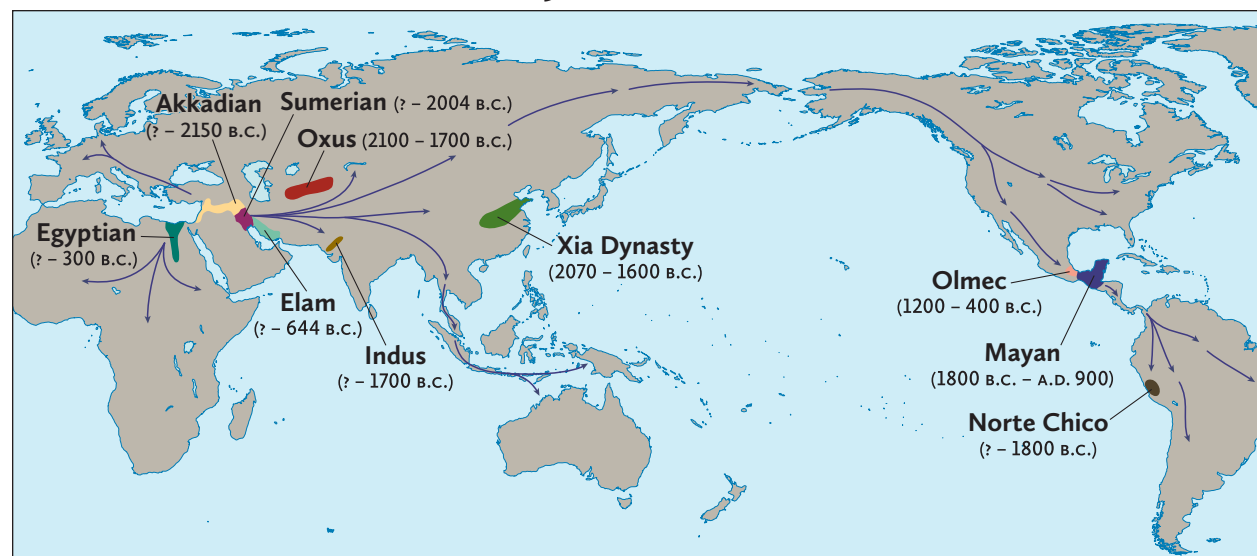
Some migrants moved beyond the Nile region and spread throughout Africa. Their descendants built vast empires—some of which amassed fabulous wealth.

Other migrants from Sumer traveled northwest and settled in Europe. Little is known about the early European civilizations. Thousands of years later, their descendants, the Celtic and Germanic tribes, became the main hindrance to Roman expansion in Europe.

Northeast of Sumer, civilizations developed on the vast plains that are now part of Russia, northwestern China, Ukraine, and Mongolia. Nomadic horse tribes, such as the Huns and Mongols, eventually developed from these areas and terrorized Europe, China, and the Middle East. For a short period, the Mongols established the largest contiguous (having all regions joined) empire in history.

To the east and southeast of Sumer, small villages appeared along the **Indus River**. This area was in what is now northern India and Pakistan. Other settlers reached the riverbanks of the Yellow River in what is now China. Large rivers helped villages develop into thriving cities by supplying water for irrigation and by serving as highways for trade with other regions.

EARLY CIVILIZATIONS UP TO A.D. 900



Wheels Through Time

We use wheels every day. Our cars, skates, machines, bicycles, shopping carts, wheelbarrows, and many other things all have wheels. Who came up with the idea for the wheel? No one knows for sure. The Sumerians seem to be the first group in Mesopotamia to use the wheel, but other societies far from Sumer, such as the Celts and the original inhabitants of Mexico, also used wheels.

The earliest wheels were made of solid wood with a hole in the center for the axle. They were made by fastening rounded pieces of wood together.

The next major development of the wheel was the invention of the spoked wheel, which



allowed for lighter and faster vehicles. Ancient Egyptian art shows what must have been very swift and light chariots with spoked wheels.

For thousands of years, wheels changed little. Then in the late 1800s, the wheel was transformed by the invention of rubber, which allowed for air-filled tires.

Migrants Explore the Ocean

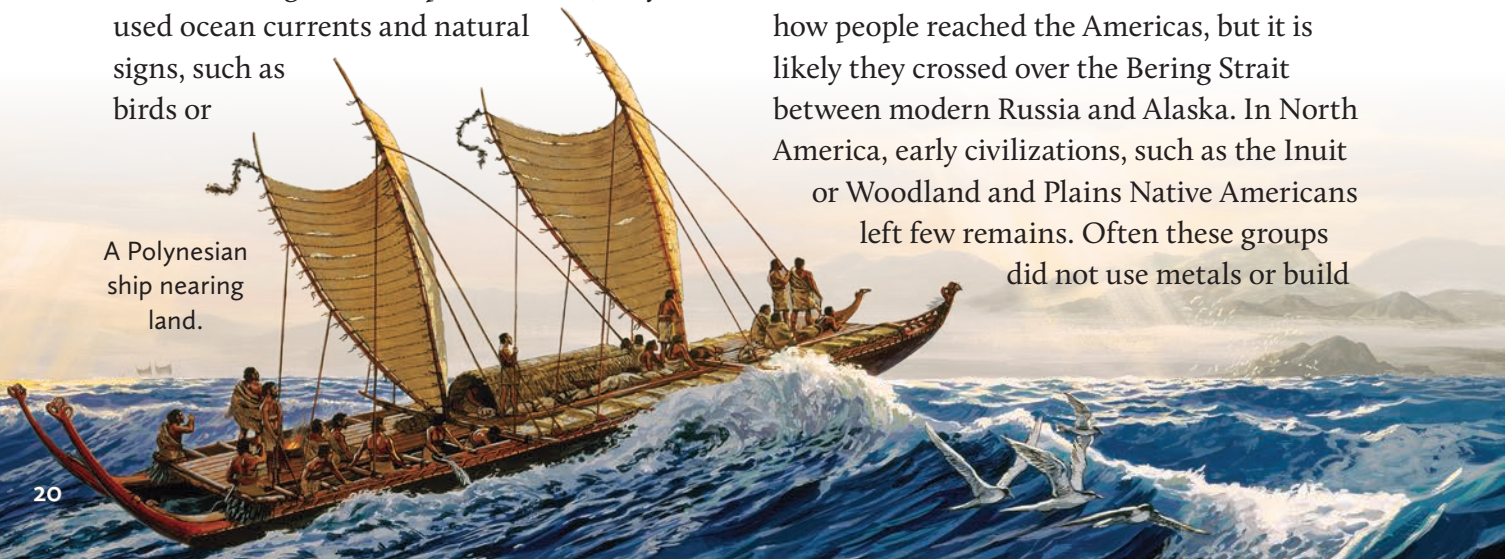
Farther southeast of the Yellow and Indus Rivers, people migrated from Asia to Australia. Their descendants are known today as the Aborigines. Other people began to explore far into the southern Pacific Ocean looking for new islands to inhabit. These explorers, known today as Polynesians, became skilled seamen. They were able to travel many days without a magnetic compass. Instead, they used ocean currents and natural signs, such as birds or

cloud formations, to tell direction and to find land. Navigators could also feel crosscurrents caused by waves hitting land. Very skilled navigators could detect crosscurrents coming from islands up to 50 miles (80 km) away.

The First Settlers Reach the Americas

Some time after people settled in Egypt, India, and China, civilizations developed on the American continents. It is unclear how people reached the Americas, but it is likely they crossed over the Bering Strait between modern Russia and Alaska. In North America, early civilizations, such as the Inuit or Woodland and Plains Native Americans left few remains. Often these groups did not use metals or build

A Polynesian ship nearing land.



Sumerian Tools

The wheel is perhaps the most famous tool used by the Sumerians. But they invented many other tools as well.

Sumerian metalworkers combined copper and tin to create the alloy called bronze. Because bronze is harder than copper, bronze tools and weapons are stronger and more effective. Workmen used bronze saws, chisels, drills, and nails in their building projects.

Sumerian farmers attached a seed funnel to their plows. As an ox-drawn plow opened a furrow in the ground, seeds were fed through the funnel, speeding the process of sowing grains. Farmers also used hand tools such as the sickle and hoe, which simplified farmwork.



Sumerians used sundials to keep track of the time of day. Astronomers calculated the time of the year with a lunisolar calendar, based on both the moon and the sun.

By using tools, the Sumerians were able to grow more food and build better cities. Once they had secure food sources and protected homes, the Sumerians were able to focus their attention on improving their civilization.

block houses. Instead, they used materials such as wood, bone, and animal skins for clothing, tools, and shelters. Over time, many remnants of these early civilizations decayed and disappeared. Some notable exceptions are the adobe homes built by the Pueblo Native Americans in the American Southwest. Other exceptions are the earthen pyramid and other mounds built by the Cahokia civilization near the modern city of St. Louis.

In Central America the Olmecs, the Mayans, and the Aztecs rose to power and then disappeared or were conquered. Unlike the civilizations to the north, Central American groups used stone and mortar for building materials. They constructed large cities and temples, which can still be visited. In South America the Norte Chico, the Chavín, and the Incas ruled in succession. These groups also built grand temples and cities using stone. Incan

masons were so skilled that they did not need to use mortar in construction. Each stone was cut to fit perfectly with those around it. Soon after Columbus reached the Americas, the Incas and Aztecs were overrun by Europeans.

STUDY EXERCISES 2.1



1. What civilization began along the Nile?
2. Along which river did civilizations begin in China?
3. Which North American civilization built a pyramid near what is now St. Louis?

CLASS DISCUSSION



1. What technologies did American civilizations lack to keep them from being overrun by Europeans?

The Sumerians did not provide free education. Most Sumerians were probably too poor to send their children to school. In addition, few Sumerian girls attended school. This meant that Sumerian students were usually the sons of royalty or of government officials, military commanders, priests, or businessmen. Students studied mostly math and language. It took years to master Sumerian cuneiform, which contained hundreds of combinations of syllables that looked very much alike.

Thousands of cuneiform tablets from Sumerian schools have been uncovered by archaeologists in Iraq. These tablets show that even before the time of Abraham, students were memorizing tedious lists of vocabulary words. In some ways, the average student's life was much the same as it is for students

today. Ancient clay tablets show student work scratched over with teachers' corrections and scolding remarks. On one student's tablet, every single word was crossed out by what must have been a very frustrated teacher.

STUDY EXERCISES 2.3



1. What type of writing replaced Sumerian pictographs?
2. What is the first known standard of value?
3. On what did Sumerian students write?

CLASS DISCUSSION



1. How are modern ways of keeping time similar to what the Sumerians used?

SECTION 4 ⊕ Empires Emerge in Sumer

The list of Sumerian achievements may sound glorious. However, early Sumerian civilization was composed of many city-states that often fought each other. Kings of large city-states tried to subdue kings of smaller city-states. Blood was shed, and families suffered.

Sometime before 2200 B.C., a powerful king named **Sargon** (sär'gän'), which means "rightful king," led his armies out of Akkad, the land north of Sumer. Sargon conquered city after city on the plain between the Tigris and Euphrates. Known as Sargon the Great, he began to unify Sumerian civilization. Eventually, the **Akkadian** (ə kă' dē ən) **Empire** covered much of the Middle East.

It stretched from the borders of modern Iran to Syria and included all of Sumer.

Sargon the Great created a central government over his empire. This meant that the rulers of smaller cities and regions within the empire had to obey Sargon's laws and pay taxes to his government. From his capital city, Sargon managed a huge government operation. This central government provided security, order, and uniformity for the various cities in the empire. Trade increased, industry grew, and the already wealthy Sumerians became even wealthier. More people owned private property, and individuals gained new rights.



An ancient bronze mask of Sargon the Great.

Sargon Builds a Standing Army

Sargon the Great conquered new lands using extreme violence. Because of this, many nations rebelled against him throughout his reign. Sargon put down rebellions ruthlessly, causing more hatred against himself. To protect himself and to be prepared for new rebellions, Sargon organized what was likely the first standing army in history.

Many armies in history were made up of part-time soldiers, who returned to their homes and livelihoods when war ended. But a person in a standing army is a professional soldier. He might

be given permission to return home for short periods, but he spends most of the year with the army preparing for war.

Sargon's army would have taken a lot of money to house, clothe, and feed. This may have been one reason why Sargon was constantly at war. When he conquered a new land, its people were forced to give up food and other things the army needed. Sargon's descendants continued the cycles of violence until finally their empire was overrun by new kings.

Troubled Times Upset Prosperity

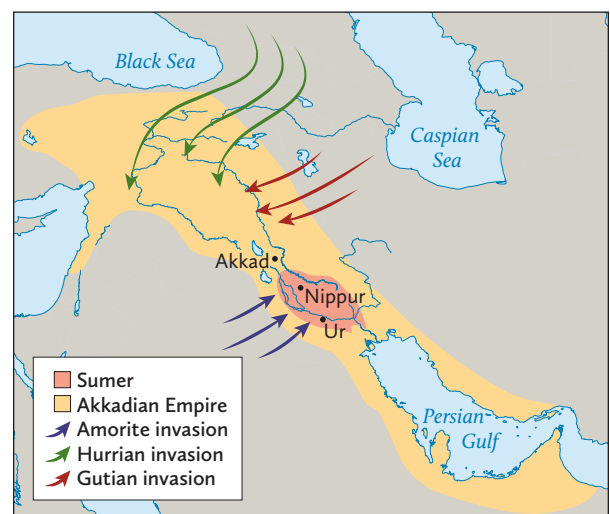
When Sargon died, his son and grandson followed him as kings. Both fought continually to hold Sargon's vast empire together. Under Sargon's grandson, the empire reached its greatest size and power. However, new threats menaced the empire. From the eastern mountains, Gutians raided villages along the borders of the kingdom. At nearly the same time, Hurrians from north of Mesopotamia began migrating into the empire, settling on the fringes of major cities. Soon, Amorites from the west invaded the cities between the lower Tigris and Euphrates.

These attacks upset the economy of Sumer. Travel was disrupted, and trade diminished. Farmers could no longer work safely in open fields, so food production declined.

After Sargon's great-grandson came to the throne, local kings realized he was not maintaining control over Sumer. They refused to cooperate with the central government, and the Akkadian Empire ended after less than two hundred years. Why were the Gutians and

other tribes so intent on raiding and settling in Mesopotamia? Archaeological evidence points to a long period of dry weather in the Middle East about the time the invasions began. The tribes living in the mountains and deserts around Mesopotamia depended on rainfall to water crops and replenish water supplies. During long periods of drought, these mountain and desert dwellers were

THE AKKADIAN EMPIRE





Sumerians watch a statue of one of their gods being carried into a ziggurat.

forced to pack up their tents and move. The prosperous cities that had developed during the height of Sumerian civilization looked very attractive to the residents of the dry, food-starved hills and deserts.

The disruptions in Mesopotamia may have been part of a larger pattern in the Middle East. During this same period, cities all around the Mediterranean Sea suffered

similar upheavals. Egypt's rulers lost control of their country. By 2080 B.C., civil war was raging up and down the Nile River. All around Greece, great buildings were burned, and in Spain, coastal fortresses were abandoned.

Sumerian Prosperity Rebounds

Although the Akkadian Empire collapsed, the civilization in Sumer still remained. Another strong leader arose in the midst of the chaos. This man was **Ur-Nammu**, king of the southern Sumerian city of **Ur**. Ur-Nammu drove out the foreign invaders and once more established a central government over Sumer.



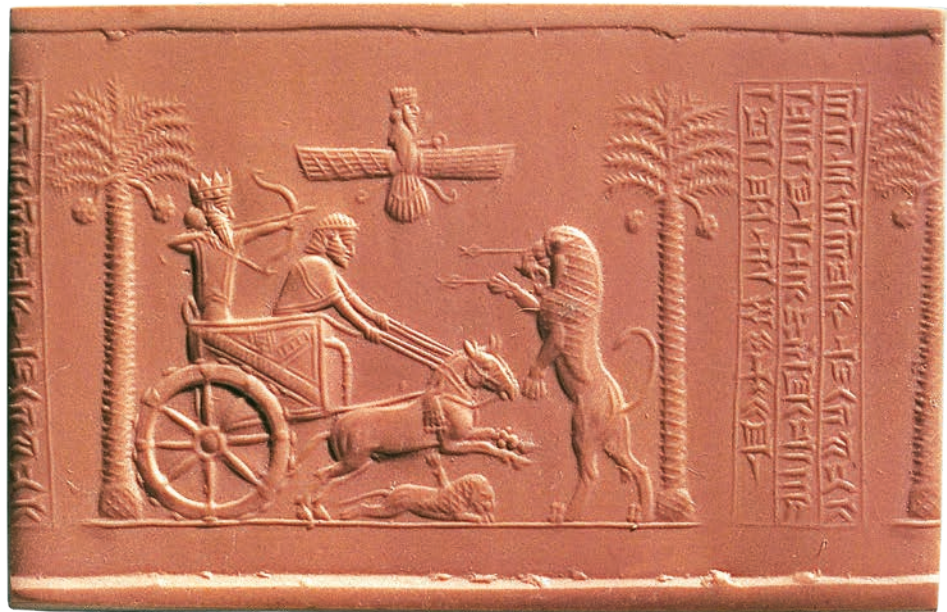
This stone statue depicts a Sumerian king. The writing on his robe tells about the temples he built or renovated.



War and Strife

War and violence have been part of human history since Cain murdered his brother Abel. Today, we seem always to hear new stories of violence and of wars that are about to start. In Matthew 24:6 Jesus says that we should expect to hear about wars and possible wars, but He tells us not to be afraid.

Consider Psalm 91:2. How can we have peace in spite of the wars and violence around us?



Cylinder seals were used in ancient Mesopotamia to place official seals on documents. By rolling the seal on soft clay, the images and characters of the seal were transferred and would set as the clay hardened.

He restored order, and prosperity returned.

During the period that followed, Ur became the chief city of the Sumerians. The Sumerians once again wrote poetry and traveled trade routes to distant shores. The new Sumerian king made an official record of Sumerian laws, the first known legal code. Sumerian craftsmen raised enormous **ziggurats** (zi' gə rats'), or pyramid-shaped temples.

Sumerian Civilization Disintegrates

The period of prosperity begun by Ur-Nammu lasted less than a hundred years. The drought conditions that had earlier pushed invaders into Mesopotamia returned, prompting a new wave of raids. This time, tribal peoples from the western deserts struck deep into the center of Sumer, overrunning cities and toppling kings. Armies from the east once again poured into Sumer. In 2004 B.C., Ur was sacked and its king carried off as a slave.

New leaders from among the invaders replaced the Sumerian kings. The Sumerian language fell out of use, and Mesopotamians

learned new languages. Individual cities regained control of their own governments. No central government oversaw food production, irrigation canals, or trade. Without this government management, the Sumerian civilization was left unprepared when faced with several years of drier-than-normal weather. Crop failure and famine soon resulted. People began moving out of Sumer, and Sumerian civilization declined.

STUDY EXERCISES 2.4



1. Who founded the Akkadian Empire?
2. What kind of government did Sargon create in Mesopotamia?
3. Who established a period of prosperity after the fall of the Akkadian Empire?

CLASS DISCUSSION



1. Why is writing poetry a sign that a civilization is strong?



The Yellow River winds its way through the Chinese countryside.

In Brief

- ▶ China's Yellow River is also called China's Sorrow due to its frequent floods.
- ▶ The deadliest flood struck in A.D. 1332, killing 7 million people.
- ▶ The Yellow River dumps about 1.5 billion tons (1.38 billion t) of silt into the sea each year.
- ▶ Ancient Chinese enriched their soil with labor-intensive compost.
- ▶ The average Chinese today eats 200 pounds (91 kg) of rice per year.
- ▶ China's 2018 population was 1.4 billion.
- ▶ Today China is the fourth-largest country in the world by area.

Chinese Agriculture

About the time people were moving from the hills of the Fertile Crescent and settling in Mesopotamia, the **Yellow River Valley** of China was still a sparsely populated jungle. It was in this valley that China's first civilization emerged. While the Mesopotamians were building cities along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the people of China were still living in small villages. The Yellow River Valley, like Mesopotamia, has no natural stone for building. Villagers protected themselves by pounding layer upon layer of earth into walls.

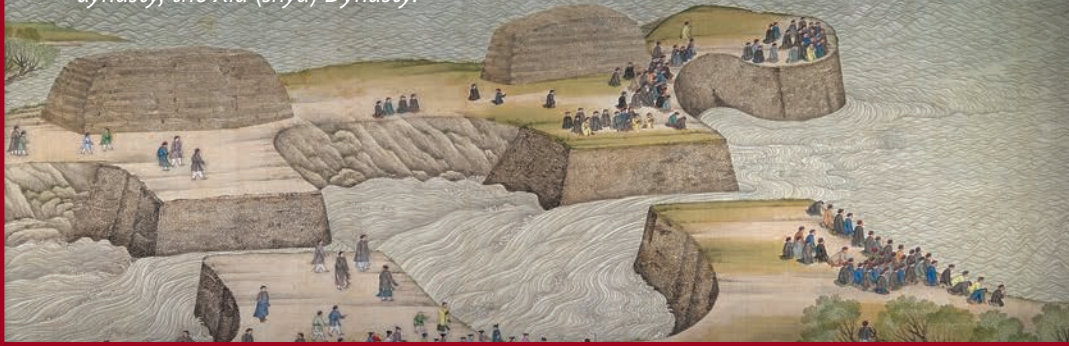
At first, these people lived by hunting and gathering. Eventually, they turned to farming and began to grow rice, wheat, and other crops. Over time, rice became the main crop. Today, China is the world's largest producer of rice.

The Yellow River was vital to the people who lived along its banks. The river, which is the sixth longest in the world, provided water for crops and allowed the Chinese to travel long distances in boats. But the Yellow River also brought destruction and death. The river carries a fine silt, called **loess**. As the loess settles, the level of the river rises. Because of this, the Chinese built dikes to keep the river from overflowing its banks and flooding fields. But eventually the river broke through the

A farmer plows rice terraces with his horse.

Yu the Great

According to legend, the problem of flooding was solved when a man named Yu used canals to drain away water after a great flood. He also began dredging waterways to clear away the loess and keep the waters from rising. For his efforts, Yu is remembered as Yu the Great and the founder of China's first dynasty, the Xia (shyā) Dynasty.



dikes. Many people died in the floods or from starvation after their fields were destroyed. The survivors were left to rebuild the dikes and replant their rice fields.

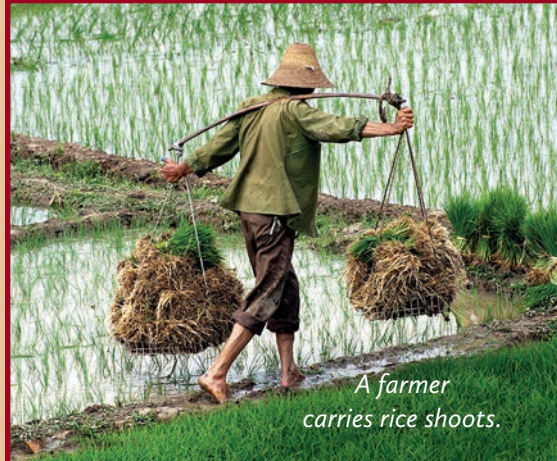
Rice is difficult to grow. The farmers had to build irrigation systems that could be opened to flood their fields before the rice was planted. Then each stalk of rice had to be planted by hand. The members of each village had to work together to build irrigation systems, decide when to flood the fields, and help each other plant the rice.

Rice farmers who lived in the plains divided their land into large fields. But farmers who lived in the mountains had to figure out a completely different way to raise rice. Mountain farmers chose a hill or mountain with a stream running down from the top. Then, using retaining walls, the farmers covered entire mountainsides with small sections of rice fields. These fields are called **terraces**. The farmers also built water systems to send the water off in another direction when they finished flooding their fields.

Rice farmers in China and other Asian countries still farm the terraces as their ancestors did thousands of years ago. Tourists from all over the world travel to the terraces to see the farms.



Farmers work together to plant rice.



A farmer carries rice shoots.



A farmer processes the harvested rice.

A bronze rice cooker (below) from around the time of Christ, and a wooden box (right) from c. A.D. 1890 for measuring rice.

